





THIS CIVILIZATION ...

By the Same Author

## FLOWER OFFERINGS (*Out of print*)

Armando Menezes—There is a singular wistfulness about this poetry which endears it to me.

Edmund Blunden—They have given me pleasure as the expression of your sensitive reflections.

K. S. Ramaswami Sastri—Your poems are short swallow flights of a tuneful soul & attract me much.

D. Kilham Roberts—Your very charming collection of prose poems which I am reading with the greatest interest.

Sukumar Dutt—You have vision & emotion and gift of expression of your own. If they mature with years, you will be able to give rare things to literature.

Julian Huxley—The task you have set yourself of writing in English is a difficult one, but the result justifies the effort.

## SONGS OF A WANDERER

Louis Cazamian, LL. B.—I congratulate you sincerely upon your early achievement and promise.

Yone Noguchi—Your fancy is delicate, your imagery is graceful and your music is soft. Your book gives me a beautiful moment of youthfulness.

Laurence Binyon, LL. B.—You have tender and true touches and something a lovely image.

Mulk Raj Anand—Your poems are lovely and sensitive, and, I feel, you have a delicate and tender vision.

Edmund Blunden—Their world is a relief from the dark and sullen day outside.

NEW BOOK COMPANY

# THIS CIVILIZATION...

*By*

P. R. KAIKINI

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TO  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU



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## INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

“HERE in England we are accustomed to think of Indian poetry as being introspective and mystical; we seldom find in it a delight in the vivid diversity of the outer world, or an intense sympathy for other people, or those ingenious comparisons and contrasts which are part of the English poetic tradition. Your work, I think, differs from most of the Indian poetry that I have seen: it looks out at the world of science, politics and everyday affairs, and it expresses a passionate sense of right and wrong. At the same time you do not lose the inward vision; your poetry is born, I believe, of a struggle between the two, and I think that such a struggle is typical of India today...”

—MICHAEL ROBERTS

18.xi.36.

Newcastle upon Tyne 2.



## THIS CIVILIZATION...

WE are bribed to breed  
God's men like cattle or horses or dogs  
On high purpose, with a plan, a design.  
From the moment they bellowed their first cry and  
Announced their triumphant entry into the world  
They have sucked wine and blood and T-N-T.  
Ever since they crawled about on their tottering  
knees  
They have gazed with wonder on balustraries  
The rifle and the bullet have interested them more  
Than did caterpillars and cocoons interest  
Pasteur or Fabre.  
They delight in riding miniature tanks  
(The fatal tricycles and scooters they'd fain blow off)  
And on Sundays parade uniformed and gunned  
In a perfect-ordered phalanx  
Through the principal city thoroughfares  
Under the glad-fiery eyes of a strong-weak Mr X.

Early or late  
They stoop to national fate  
To their God-ordained destiny.  
They embrace the arms and kiss the bomb  
To free men who are slaves to men  
They war with war to bring peace to the race of  
man.

Their shell and shrapnel rock the chosen land  
And cleave the fair virgin soil  
With wedges of fire and rancour and desolation  
Sow seeds of flashing steel and stinking decomposition  
Befoul the wells and rivers with human blood  
Making free unasked gifts of waste, waste, waste,  
Of ravaging decay, of eating, dark disease.

Their clamouring bombing planes  
Dominate the dusky sky like locusts  
Before them is a tender, smiling heaven  
Behind them a blown-up battered hell,  
Their batteries (masked and unmasked)  
That are the clarion-call to peace and civilization  
Unnerve and shock the alleged unmoral  
Black aborigines  
Murder in cold blood their women and children  
And bury them alive  
Under the dead weight  
Of the ancient, glorious, discoloured civilization.  
The victims' dying wish is  
They were Roman galley-slaves at least !

## CONTINUITY

OUT of  
the drowning and deepening empty spaces  
leaps forth a mad hungry flame  
lusty and enraged,  
pursuing innocent desire  
to the edges of the earth  
seduces and devours her.....

Impassioned sighs and sounds  
dim and die down,  
the fire subsides and smoulders,  
the fury of the winds is no more,  
the dawning day  
binds two vagrant rebel souls  
by the gentle invisible bands of mating  
to an eternal union.....

And man casts his wondering eyes  
on this throbbing, scene-shifting world.

## THE DONKEY

HE wanders over the wild countryside  
A reckless rake,  
His feet proudly treading  
The snug familiar ground.

Sometimes he remembers  
And struts, remembering his ancestral glory  
Upon the cold still hill  
Under whose shady depths rests perchance an  
unknown king or clown.

Sometimes, he forgets  
And lingers and loiters long  
Over the unenchanted unbounded plain  
The holy sepulchre of Akbars and Alexanders.

Often he dreams—  
And hears the bells and the flutter of leaves,  
Sees in a flash  
The sumptuous splendour of his buried days.

Oftener he wakes, the wretch—  
And carries sand and stone,  
    wood and water  
    man and woman  
Snarling under the relentless whip  
He swears as he trudges along the ever-winding way  
He curses, curses all the way.

## QUETTA (1935)

THE flaming wheels of Shiva's Timeless chariot  
Lurch in one insignificant fraction of an earthly  
minute

Over a fortified city, a sea of slumbering humanity—  
The tallest tower and bourgeois' house and pauper's  
slum

Are rocked to their doom and final extinction.

Maybe a man lay dreaming of his woman  
Maybe a babe was sucking at its mother's breasts  
Maybe a dancing girl was performing before her  
visitors

Maybe an infirm beggar lay on the cold footpath  
awake with hunger,

Now Quetta is a common catacomb for these all.

I smell death's poison in the air—  
The chaos of debris shows  
A grey head here and there a pair of battered feet  
Here's a sinister, lurid face turned dark :  
Two socketless eyes, minus nose and left ear  
No shoulders, no trunk, no legs !

At last the salvage begins,  
They bear on the stretchers  
Dead and half-dead men.  
There goes one whose eyes are rolling like a windmill's  
wings  
His heart is all a flutter,  
His soul seems too much smothered to live again  
Too much bled for human tears to be shed !

## THE HAUNTED BEACH

THERE'S an old half-crumbled tomb  
beside the unfrequented beach of the sea:  
no man is known to loiter there  
long after sun-down.

A queer music animates the cold midnight air  
the leaves start in wild ecstasy as in a storm,  
flickering flames leap out from each branch ...

Opens on a sudden the plastered lid, and  
three transparent gigantic figures emerge,  
their eyes are burning molten gold  
their ears withered palm-leaves  
their lips scarlet with deadly potion.

One evening I cast my anchor  
in the offing of the self-same sea  
at the exact hour the trees shook madly  
and revealed three demons dancing in a ring  
their victim lay at their feet a bundle of broken bones,  
a yell, a roar—  
and the moon shone merrily as before  
on the quiet beach.

I met a girl in the adjoining village:  
she was waiting for her father  
to come home across the sea.....

## NEW LIFE — ONE VERSION

I AM glad you have come...  
Come, join me at the table  
For afternoon tea...  
Ah, kiss me your old love again  
Let us live in peace and concord...  
If the sun and the moon  
Can stay in the firmament together for ever  
Why can't you and I  
Live our short remnant of life under one roof ?  
We will sail home after supper  
You and I alone under the full moon to-night  
And live our life anew  
In a small cosy cottage  
In the heart of an enchanted isle.

## NEW LIFE — ANOTHER VERSION

HERE I am  
in my new house  
living my *new* life.

Overlooking my uncurtained window  
are the mountains, cliffs and valleys  
the wind blows over my garden walls  
grey smoke lifts slowly from the city mills  
the storm shakes my house by night,  
grey mists obstruct my view by day —  
the clouds fly over my new brown tiles  
in endless succession of shifting shadows  
*as of yore.*

But you, ah my love,  
your electric eyes  
your raven waving hair  
your soft almond hands  
your face panoplied with smiles  
your lips, your lips I knew so well  
your body that would have made  
a perfect model for a native Epstein,  
these I miss evermore.

**My *new* life is equal  
to the old one minus you ! my *new* life !**

## YOU AND I

MY eyes are the expansive halcyon pond  
In which your beauty is locked like a moon.

Your voice is the wild forest song,  
My ears the wind that bears it far and wide.

My dreams are the trees  
And you the shapely shadows they cast.

Your body is the barge on Life's boisterous seas  
My soul the boatman ferrying to the Unknown Shore.

## RELATIVITY

I ROWED my tiny boat  
To dark No-land  
Where No-one holds unquestioned sway.

There are no men there  
And if there were, would be no better  
Than mortar or clay.

But the wind has a human voice  
And trees have living limbs  
Stones can walk and run and dance  
The houses are builded in the void—  
or rather *not* builded.

Our brains very much resemble  
The cotton that grows wild there.

Our throbbing grieving loving hearts  
Are as good as a dead frog in the mire.

Our night and day and wind and rain  
Have no meaning there.

Out eternity has no place on their time-scale  
Our men are mere nothings in dark No-land.

## SLAUGHTER-HOUSE

THE burning mid-day sun  
Darkens the powdered face of a young woman  
Who rides in a hack victoria  
Down the asphalt street.

A half-nude leper  
Squatting on the footpath beside the lotus-lake  
Giggles and grunts and grunts and giggles  
And salaams you, spreading his dissolving hand  
For a stray copper.

The hired herdsmen  
Drive a motley crowd of sheep and cattle  
Lead four hundred earnest pattering hooves  
Four hundred dancing, hurrying hooves  
To the tin-shed from where they return no more!

## RENDEZVOUS

**A**T full gallop I rode  
Dressed in my newest garment  
To the far-off unpeopled forest  
Beyond the humming town.

But how frail was your body  
How faint my throbbing heart  
Our love was already tainted with tears  
And our souls lay shrouded in death's gloom.

## LOVE

IT is not love  
That you whisper to your girl  
Sing in a serenade  
Or write in a perfumed letter.

Your stale breath  
Wooden words  
Insinuating eyes  
( Of "fair speechless messages" fame )  
Stink of sheer greed  
Of nude lust  
Passion intriguing with passion  
Flesh plotting against flesh  
Body betraying body  
Hunger feeding hunger.

That is how you love !

## RAIN-CLOUDS

BORN on high  
Borne by winds  
Over deep oceans  
Landwards

Light-fleecy  
Dapple-perfect  
Full-pregnant  
Slow-sailing

Mountain-tumbled  
Chilled  
Gravitating  
Enchanted  
Metamorphosed :

Patter  
Plash...  
Patter  
Plash...  
Patter  
Plash...  
Splash...  
Splash.....  
Splash.....

## THE PILGRIM

I KNOW not  
Whence came I.

I have met the sun  
And stood the raging storm  
Discussed with the noon-tide's nymphs  
The birth of Birth and the death of Death.

I have sung an impassioned serenade  
Under the gleam of summer moonshine  
My eyes have penetrated  
The iris-haze of mists and men.

The dusk has cast a gloom  
On the boundless soundless sea  
But what Unseen God has given me power  
To turn darkness into eternal light ?

I hear an indistinct sound, an urgent word  
A magic whisper from a far-off unknown land  
I glide on like dust-particles floating in a sun-beam  
To my rest in the endless haven they call sleep.

I know not  
Whither I go.

## THE POET'S CHALLENGE

TIME, you bold-faced robber  
Blow your chill icy winds  
Your blasting burning breath  
Over my frail body.

Splash your gigantic tides  
And drown the memories of men  
Close their mirroring eyes  
With lids of opaque stone.

Let my remembered name  
Be locked in a devouring crater  
Let the light of my beauty-drunk eyes  
Be quenched in eternal ugliness.

Bury me deep, deep under  
Death's ghastly night  
Reduce my dancing bones  
To threadbare rags  
That no needy beggar may touch,  
Transform my rhythmic blood  
Into water soaked into the mire  
That no thirsty dog may sip.

But remember my words, you Great One,  
Young moon-bewitched maidens restless between  
dusk and dawn  
Widowed mothers anxiously awaiting their sons'  
return from the field

Kings rolling uneasily in their downy beds  
Youths wasting their vitality in drunken  
midnight-revels

All these and many, many more souls  
To be born in the timeless centuries of futurity  
Will dip into my poetry for solace  
Muse and rejoice and lose themselves  
Enchanted by its lyric ecstasy,  
But they will forget *you* the while.

## BUILDING THE WORLD

I MET a peasant-girl  
Maybe a twentyweek ago  
In the wide furrowed field  
Beside the steep grey hill.

She was scattering the new seed  
On the ploughed land.

She eyed me closely  
And smiled and ran to me  
Said the dawn was  
Passionate and young.

But she didn't want  
To get older  
Alone  
And burn to ashes  
Like the slow-decaying beams  
Of the October sun...

We climbed the cliffs  
To reach a modest wooden-house  
Very neat and clean and cosy.

We ate and drank  
Had bacon and bread and butter, and toast and tea  
Made merry till the sun  
Sank in the beating sea.

The night came on soon  
I sat smoking in an arm-chair  
The flowers were dallying  
The winds blowing high and shrill  
The brook babbling loud  
As it ran down our hill.

Bewitching beauty has  
Strange charm and  
Stranger power  
To charm.

“I am yours for the asking,” she said  
“Let us all go the ancient way  
The way our forefathers trod.  
The lily is only for the day  
And so is youth, yours and mine  
Give me the seed, the magic seed.  
Let us make this night our most boisterous one  
The most memorable.  
Man is made  
To dry a woman’s tears  
With his tongue and heart and handkerchief.  
To quench her new-born hunger  
With his comfortable touch,  
Though transient is human life  
This hour, this day, this mortal clay  
This exquisite time will be recorded in heaven

As eternal in youth  
And eternal in beauty's perfection  
In the God's great scheme of things."

I held the lantern in my hand  
And followed her speechlessly  
Into the inner room.

She put out the light,  
And we were plunged in a lampless darkness.

Below us beat the great sea  
The western winds roared wildly  
The bird's cage rocked gaily in the open window.

I am glad  
A new fire is taking furtive birth and form  
In her prolific body  
Strong enough to light the earth  
And set her laughing in the wind  
And make her exultant and thankful.

Though I will return to her no more  
I will dance in glee :  
I have laboured in lighting one candle  
To brighten this world.

Though I will not return to her any more  
I will dance and dance and dance.

## WHITHER ?

I SAW a flock of singing birds  
Desert their new-made mating bowers  
And rush forth suddenly from the grove of trees.

The tearing whistling North-wind  
Whizzed through the ominous stillness  
Driving the warblers to an unknown haven.

They flashed like a streak of lightning  
Fluttered their silver wings like an oread's laughter  
Away on the blue horizon.

They sped with a swiftness fleeter than Creation  
gave them  
Because their spirits were kindled with the heaven's  
fire  
But I know not where they live or lie !

## GLIMPSE OF IMMORTALITY (1936)

ON the last Saturday of January last  
At seven to five sharp  
A star deserted its celestial company  
And took birth in human shape:

A delicate rosy-cheeked girl\*—  
Sweet and most sublime.  
Her language is  
Ununderstood babble  
Too deep for human understanding.  
Her crystal eyes reflect  
The whole range of heaven's limitless wealth  
Her little waving hands  
Seem to be dropping hallowed flowers  
And bring us blessings from the other world.

The singing birds come darting  
To our eaves above the windows:

"You are a little angel  
Flying with the flaming wings of dawn  
Your palms contain infinity in them  
And your laughter rocks the sky.

You are like a moon  
That penetrates heavy clouds of mists  
And appears to fainting travellers  
A glowing ball of golden light.

You are like one  
That knows not his own immortality."

Baby Mohini Naidu, the author's niece.

## ARAB WOMAN

**H**ER eyes are like  
The big round setting sun  
Her hair is long and sleek like silk  
Dark like a desert night.  
Her ruddy cheeks are  
Soft like butter made from goats' milk.  
Her curved chin  
Like an orange in a cup  
Her feet are fleet  
Like the gazelle her menfolk hunt  
Her smiling face is  
An oasis in a long sea of endless burning sand..

She cooks all the meals herself  
Washes her husband's feet  
Clothes him  
Brings him his hukka  
Whets his weapons  
Sings him to sleep  
Her vigilance guards him  
During the dark, uncertain Arabian nights..

In return  
She receives  
Devoted protection  
Enough food  
Enough work  
Unremitting love  
And a child every summer.

## THE PIT

WE watch the skies  
And look for sky-blue eyes.

We read Shakespeare's love-themes  
And lie in wait for a likely maiden  
To jump upon and romance with.

We visit the exciting talkies  
And kiss a girl mechanically.  
With our mechanical lips  
We long for something beyond  
Transcendent, unearthly—  
In vain, it seems.

We dream of completeness  
Harmony, union, perfection  
And breast rests on breast,  
Knee meets knee  
Body supports body...

We only fall  
Grope eternally  
In darkness,  
Struggle ceaselessly  
In the bottomless abyss.  
And burning in hell  
We die.

Are reborn  
Again to burn  
And die...

Again.....

## A POETRY READER

’T WAS the other day:

I was riding in a suburban train  
A woman was seated in front of me  
Buried in a daintily bound little volume.  
Bold-coloured, warrior-like was her raiment  
Her hair fashionably dressed  
On her thin white wrists dangled four bangles  
of gold  
Her form was marvellous, it was a pleasure to look  
at her.

She would have charmed kings  
Owned palatial buildings  
Driven in a silk-curtained Rolls-Royce ...

I could not see her face  
I knew not whence came she  
Or what her name was.

I only saw my name on the back of her book.  
Maybe she will meet me again.

## A WOMAN'S SONG

I AM the wet clay  
You are the potter.

I am the water  
You the pots, ponds and seas.

I am the notes  
You the clear song.

I am the oil in a lamp  
You the flame that kindles.

I am the four walls  
You the dweller within.

I am you  
You are I.

## MY LOVE

MY love lived in a commercial city  
Beside a great river  
She worked from early morn  
Till the day burned to its tip.  
Every Saturday evening I met her  
At the talkies  
She would whisper into my ears  
"I will soon share your room with you, my dear."

My neighbours said this evening  
Her garment got entangled in a fly-wheel  
She was dragged in and pulp made of her soft body.

Her dear sweet soothing words  
"I will soon share your room with you, my dear"  
Will charm me to-night  
Into an everlasting sleep.

## EVENING IN KHAR

BROODING shadows descend on the dapper model  
village

Jewelled plumes of homing pigeons gleam in the  
twilight sky

The young and fair and old are out to see and be seen  
A whole phalanx perched on cement-seats at the  
cross-roads.

The sea-breezes wake and whistle through the garden  
trees

Scattering the serried leaves in a shower on the  
pathways

Round the bend a young maid powders her face as  
she walks

At the end of the street four bluff men push an old,  
worn-out Ford.

## WORKSHOP

THE din of giant wheels rolls and swells  
A hundred hands move and jostle each other  
Like a whizzing clanging engine gone out of control  
Within a huge tinned tunnel protected from  
sunlight.

The men sweat ceaselessly, their heads bent in  
patient toil  
Fighting a losing battle with up-to-date modern  
machinery  
While their master like a little guilty angel  
Is busy taking his drive, dreaming, dreaming of build-  
ing himself a house of gold.

## TO-DAY'S MARKET VALUE

I SAW the same fat  
giantesque thief-of-time  
man dagberman highwayman  
spinning in a fat motor-car  
along twenty-nine vellards

his face shining  
glittering a fragmentary  
half-decaying broadening  
disease of a smile

rushing to a bourne of  
shifting minutes  
no past no future  
no memories only this  
passing present

brain's an ever-revolving  
disk attempting to corrode  
dissolve the mighty  
edifice built on steel structures  
glittering hard-wrested gold  
fabulous preposterous bank-balances  
great hopes banked treasured  
for prolific progeny to come.

‘I'd go to Illinois (says he)  
escape the fever the brain-fag  
drive a donkey taxi  
or row on the Suez Canal

the blithe swarthy sprites  
of raped Ethiopia  
no I don't want  
no wrist-watch  
I—I—I  
you you you  
are a  
democrat—no ?—democrat  
dae moe craat  
I am then a  
man  
I mean the  
peoples' man ...

What ? Mosco ?  
Damn you for it  
don't you talk no more  
to me of your mosco  
the fire is red already  
and my eye is red  
and my blood is red  
red florid red  
like red  
I am no Spanish bull  
am I ? You tell me  
a man I am  
a man  
man of men,  
not God's.



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